DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 143 RC 020 848

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TITLE	Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Homeless Children and Families in Small-Town America.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-8131-1943-X
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	283p.
AVAILABLE FROM	University Press of Kentucky, 663 S. Limestone St., Lexington, KY 40508-4008 (cloth: ISBN-0-8131-1943-X, $39.95; paper: ISBN-0-8131-0872-1, $16.95).
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Children; Child Welfare; Community Action; Demography; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Health; *Family Problems; High Risk Students; *Homeless People; Housing Deficiencies; Human Services; *Poverty; Rural Areas; *Rural Family; Rural Youth; *Small Towns; Social Problems; Transient Children; Unemployment
IDENTIFIERS	New Hampshire; Resilience (Personality); Working Poor

ABSTRACT

Homelessness in small towns and rural areas is on the rise, and a substantial portion of the rural homeless consists of families with children. This book draws on interviews and case studies of over 300 homeless children and their families, primarily in New Hampshire, and on supporting statistics to provide individual and sociological perspectives on homelessness. Chapter 1 discusses problems in identifying homeless children and families in rural areas; the inadequacy of the term "homeless" for describing the rural experience; estimates of the extent of the problem; and the particular risks of homelessness for young families, single mothers, "independent" teenagers, and teens who grow up in foster care. Chapter 2 examines how personal and marital problems combined with economic and social forces beyond the family's control can push a family into homelessness. Chapters 3 and 4 describe the impact of homelessness on physical and mental health. Chapter 5 discusses educational implications of homelessness: denial of education to transient students, learning difficulties that result from lack of a place to sleep or study, the need for schools to provide extra help, and the determination and resilience of some homeless children who recognize school as their only lifeline. Chapters 6-8 examine the roots of homelessness in public policy, economic change, lack of affordable rural housing, and inadequate human services in rural areas. Chapter 9-11 provide a framework for understanding rural homelessness and discuss ways to promote community action. Appendices include a student essay, "My Wild Gypsy Life" (Yanali LaHaine), and a summary outline of the causes of rural family homelessness. Contains over 400 references, an index, and photographs. (SV)